

DISAGREEMENT AND THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

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Recently, philosophers have put forth views in the epistemology of disagreement that emphasize the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in disagreement. In the first part of the paper, I attempt a rational reconstruction of these views. I construe these views as invoking the first-person perspective to explain why it is rational for parties to a disagreement to privilege their own opinions in the absence of independent explanations for doing so—to *privilege without independent explanations*. I reconstruct three ways privilege might be thought to arise: by *demotion*, through *self-trust*, and through *the epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective*. I argue that none of these ways, and none of the views that make use of them, clarify a compelling account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective. In the second part of the paper, I try to discern some lessons and outline an alternative approach. According to this approach, the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is not to explain privilege without independent explanations but to explain *the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding*. These limits are manifest in reflective disagreement and explain how other minds matter for one's own mind in the pursuit of knowledge. The resulting view about the epistemology of disagreement is neither skeptical nor dogmatic, but *dialectical*, involving an *active* mental state that conceptualizes not only the subject matter but also one's own and others' minds in thinking and rational interaction at the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding.

I begin with a brief introduction to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement, to the *skeptical* and *anti-skeptical* responses to the question, and to the idea that the first-person perspective makes an important epistemic difference.

1. Skepticism, Anti-Skepticism, Perspective

The question of the epistemic significance of disagreement focuses on disagreement under conditions of epistemic equality. I will follow Thomas Kelly (2005) in understanding the relevant kind of epistemic equality as the notion of two individuals *x* and *y* being *epistemic peers with respect to some question*. Let us say that *x* and *y* are *epistemic peers with respect to whether p* just in case (1) they are equally familiar with the arguments and evidence for and against *p*, and (2) they are equally epistemically virtuous.¹ The question of the epistemic significance

1. This definition has not gone unchallenged. For some discussion see Elga (2007: 490 and fn. 21), and Wedgwood (2010: §3, §6). However, these differences do not, as far as I can see, make a difference to the argument to be given.

of disagreement then can be put like this: how should one's awareness of disagreement with those one takes to be one's epistemic peers affect one's confidence in one's beliefs or opinions?

In the literature, two broad kinds of responses have been pursued.

The first response is skeptical, and counsels lowering confidence or even suspending belief.² The skeptical response derives support from an emphasis on considerations of epistemic symmetry in peer disagreement. Given that peers share evidence and epistemic virtues, explanations for the existence of disagreement need to appeal elsewhere to explain why it is one peer rather than the other that is more likely at fault. If no explanation makes it more likely that *I* am not the one making the mistake, or that *my peer* is the one making a mistake, how can I persist in belief without a loss of confidence?

Of course parties to the disagreement differ, both in the conclusions they come to and in the precise reasoning or evaluation of the evidence they employ in coming to those conclusions. These differences constitute asymmetries in the peer conditions. But an appeal to these asymmetries is impotent against the skeptical conclusion. Peers cannot appeal to these differences in justifying their opinions without begging the question against each other. When peers disagree, both their conclusions and the precise reasoning and evaluation of the evidence they employ are under reciprocal challenge. What is wanted in the evaluation of opinion in disagreement is not a *justification* of opinion from the *first-person perspectives* of the parties to the disagreement but rather an *explanation* for the existence of the disagreement that is *independent* of the considerations operative in the disagreement and that can be appreciated from the *third-person perspective* of one who “brackets” (Christensen 2011: 18) or “extracts” (Elga 2007: 490) the considerations that are constitutive of the disagreement.³ The motto here is: *no privilege without independent explanations*. The skeptical response to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement comes to the fore when the epistemic symmetry of peer disagreement is emphasized to the degree that correspondingly makes the fund of independent considerations vanishingly small. In these conditions the demand for independent explanations leads to the skeptical response.

The second response is anti-skeptical, and defends the view that in the face of disagreement one can persist in belief without a loss of confidence. I will be discussing anti-skeptical views in detail soon, but what I want to emphasize at

2. See Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Feldman (2007), for early defense of the skeptical view. Let me note here that further argument is required to show that the skeptical response to peer disagreement entails a generalized skepticism according to which we know very little or nothing. See §2.2 below for further discussion.
3. Christensen describes a principle of *Independence* that governs the evaluation of opinion in disagreement as follows:

In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another's expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn't rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about P (Christensen 2011: 1–2).

For example, being drunk or having a vested interest in the matter of a disagreement are factors that can independently explain why it is more likely that one peer is more likely to be in error than the other. Cf. also Christensen (2007: 16–17).

the outset is not so much the opposition to skeptical views, but, for many authors, *how* their anti-skepticism opposes skepticism. In his contribution to justifying the anti-skeptical view, Kelly cites Richard Foley's injunction that "it is deeply misleading to think about such conflicts in terms of a model of neutral arbitration between conflicting parties." According to the anti-skeptic, the skeptic comes to the wrong conclusion on peer disagreement because she tries to model peer disagreement from the *third-person perspective*. But what is required to properly answer the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement is a completely new model, one that models disagreement from the *first-person perspective*.⁴

This is an interesting line of response. To make the response more precise would require saying more about the requisite notion of *modeling*. But the response bears not only further elucidation, but, ideally, also logical strengthening. The first-person perspective is so far invoked only in a critical role, to challenge the skeptical response. But can invoking the first-person perspective somehow form the basis of an argument for the anti-skeptical response? More specifically, does the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement consist in the role of the first-person perspective in explaining the possibility of privilege without independent explanations? Can invoking the first-person perspective somehow break the epistemic symmetry of the peer situation in a way that epistemically privileges . . . *me*? If so, how?

2. The Epistemic Relevance of the First-Person Perspective: To Explain Privilege without Independent Explanations

I consider these questions in detail later in this section (§2.1–§2.3). But first, in order to bring further sharpness to the discussion, let me motivate two hurdles that any account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective should be able to clear to be both informative and correct.

Consider first:

Hurdle 1: The First-Personal Basis of Privilege Needs Elaboration

The account must say something more about the first-personal basis for privilege than simply, to put it first-personally, that my beliefs are privileged because they are *mine*.⁵

4. Not all anti-skeptical views are defended by appeal to the first-person perspective. For a recent example see White (2009).
5. Some of these points could be put in terms of the "The Extra Weight View" (Elga 2007), according to which extra weight is to be given to one's own opinions in a disagreement because they are one's own. Elga's approach and my own are connected in the following way: a proper explanatory basis for privilege without independent explanations should either explain why certain untoward bootstrapping consequences are not entailed by privileging one's own view, or why they are not really untoward (cf. Kelly 2010: §5.4, and especially Enoch 2010: §9).

The most straightforward and simple account of the first-personal basis of privilege says that one's beliefs are privileged because they are one's own. But that a belief is mine does not, in general, count as a reason for it (cf. Conee 2009: 315). Since this simple and straightforward explanation of the first-personal basis of privilege is a non-starter, an informative account must explain exactly how (since it is not in the most simple and straightforward way) invoking the first-person perspective is supposed to provide support for privilege without independent explanations.

Next consider:

Hurdle 2: The Revenge of Symmetry

The account must explain why any *asymmetry* that invoking the first-person perspective introduces does not give way to a higher order *symmetry* that can reinstate skepticism.

The idea behind Hurdle 2 is this. Suppose that I am party to a peer disagreement. Peer disagreements possess significant epistemic symmetry. This symmetry can be appreciated from my first-person perspective. This appreciation of symmetry in peer disagreement from my first-person perspective pushes the epistemology of disagreement in a skeptical direction. But, those who argue for the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective say that the first-person perspective also introduces an *asymmetry*. For only *my* reasoning appears right from my first-person perspective. Suppose this asymmetry allows me to privilege my own opinion in the absence of independent explanations. Presumably my peer's similar invocation of the first-person perspective allows *her* to asymmetrically privilege *her* opinion from *her* perspective in the absence of independent explanations. This constitutes a higher order *symmetry*. This higher order symmetry can also be appreciated from my first-person perspective. But if the lower order symmetry pushes the epistemology in a skeptical direction, why should this higher order symmetry not do so as well? Invoking the first-person perspective looks to be subject to a revenge problem that serves to reinstate pressure towards skepticism (cf. Christensen 2007: 196).

Let us see whether these hurdles can be cleared by considering some ways in which philosophers have actually tried to clear them. In §2.1–§2.3 I explain and assess three interrelated ways that invoking the first-person perspective might be thought to provide support for privilege without independent explanations: by explaining the *rationality of demoting* one's peer because they have, *from one's perspective*, made a mistake (§2.1); by highlighting *the epistemic relevance of self-trust* (§2.2); and by highlighting *the epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective* (§2.3). My plan, in each subsection, is to articulate in schematic form a way to explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective, and then to fill out this schematic description with discussion of a detailed, nuanced, and relevant view from the literature. Although these ways and the views that make use of them purport to explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective, I will be arguing that they in fact fail to do this by arguing that that they fail to provide accounts that clear the necessary hurdles. §3 provides an alternative account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in

the epistemology of disagreement, and outlines an answer to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement in the terms of this alternative account.⁶

2.1 On Demoting

Perhaps the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is to be found in

The rationality of demotion

From a third-person perspective, neither party to a peer disagreement looks privileged. But from the first-person perspectives of each of the parties to the disagreement, it looks like only they themselves, and not their peers, have reasoned properly and formed the correct opinion. From my first-person perspective, it looks like I have done epistemically better than you, and this is an asymmetry in the peer situation that provides a basis for *dismissing* your opinion and *demoting* you from peer status. The result is privilege for my own opinions without independent explanations. The epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is that only by invoking it does *the rationality of demotion* come into view.

In this section I will be concerned to elaborate and assess this reasoning. I focus on some recent work by David Enoch (2010) that is quite explicit in its ambition to argue for the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective while making use of something like this reasoning.⁷

Let me first describe Enoch's view in broad strokes. Enoch's view invokes the first-person perspective to make plausible a moderate anti-skeptical alternative to his specific skeptical opponent, the Equal Weight View. Enoch argues for his conclusions on the basis of the *ineliminability* of the first-person perspective, and

6. Let me note that the arguments I direct against other views are not intended to show that those views are incorrect as answers to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement (although I do believe that they are incorrect as such), but only that these views do not provide an informative and correct account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement. The question addressed in this paper is not: what is the epistemic significance of disagreement? Instead, the paper answers the questions: does some account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective arise out of the epistemology of disagreement, and if so what is it? And what does this account of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective tell us about the epistemic significance of disagreement? That none of the most prominent views explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement is significant for anyone who thinks that the notion of the first-person perspective is theoretically essential for answering the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement.
7. Kelly also gives the impression, at least initially, of arguing for the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective on the same kind of basis (Kelly 2005: 179). However, when Kelly elaborates his view and, in effect, tries to clear the necessary hurdles that I have described, the view shifts to another view, *The Right Reasons View* (Elga 2007). (A version of this kind of problem affects Enoch's view as well, as we shall see). Kelly's (2010) different view has strong affinities with the view of Enoch's that I'll be considering. However, for purposes of exploring the relevance of the first-person perspective, it is more instructive to consider Enoch's view, which is more explicit about the role of the first-person perspective.

the way this ineliminability highlights the possibility and importance of demotion. Enoch thinks that the first-person perspective is ineliminable in cases “that are based on a reflective consideration of the evidence . . . in which the believing self is fully engaged” (Enoch 2010: §3),⁸ and that this ineliminability of the first-person perspective supports a moderate anti-skeptical view via a mechanism of demotion (Enoch 2010: §6).

The core of Enoch’s argument can be culled from the following passages:

[given awareness of disagreement] why think that the only acceptable way of restoring probabilistic coherence is by according [to one’s peer] . . . equal weight, rather than by (at least partly) demoting [her] . . . from . . . peer status? (Enoch 2010: §6)

. . . given the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the (at least moderate) self-trust that comes with it, why on earth should you not see [your peer’s] belief not-*p* as reason to believe he is less reliable than you otherwise would take him to be? After all, when you believe *p*, you do not just entertain the thought *p* or wonder whether *p*. Rather, you really believe *p*, you take *p* to be true. And so you take [your peer’s] belief in not-*p* to be a mistake. And, of course, each mistake someone makes (on the relevant topic) makes him somewhat less reliable (on the relevant topic) and makes you somewhat more justified in treating him as less reliable (on the relevant topic). Why should this mistake, then, be any different? Why should it count—against [your peer’s] reliability—less than [your peer’s] previous mistakes? True, all of this is, as it were, from your own perspective, but it is precisely such an objection that is rendered irrelevant by the ineliminability point. (Enoch 2010: §6)

Here is my reconstruction. What matters is not just peerhood, but peerhood where the peers are *justifiably believed by each other to be peers*. When this is the case, peers’ respective first-person perspectives will include beliefs concerning the peer status of others. Like other beliefs, these beliefs are revisable. Their revisability is manifest in disagreement, where, from the respective first-person perspectives of each peer, the other peer is making a mistake. The mistakes of others, as judged from the first-person perspective, are exactly the kind of thing that go into justifying beliefs about peerhood, and do so as well here, in the case of peer disagreement, and sometimes in the form of justifying demotion. To object that this seems so only from the first-person perspective is to forget about the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the need to rely on one’s own beliefs, including beliefs about peerhood.

8. Enoch does not think that the first-person perspective is always ineliminable, and in general Enoch does not think that there is any general answer to the question of what the epistemic significance of disagreement is (Enoch 2010: §10; see also Kelly’s 2010 *Total Evidence View*). The reflective cases in which the first-person perspective is ineliminable are to be distinguished from cases of disagreement involving “mere seemings” for which “we can perfectly happily settle for the third-personal point of view” (Enoch 2010: §3). However, some other things Enoch says are in tension with these ideas about the connections between seemings, the first-person perspective, and, the rationality of demotion. See his fn. 24.

What about our hurdles? Enoch's way of clearing Hurdle 2 is to emphasize that although on his view the asymmetry from the respective first-person perspectives of the parties to the disagreement can give way to an awareness of a higher order symmetry, this awareness of a higher order symmetry is irrelevant to his account. As Enoch puts it, "your reason to change your mind about [your peer's] reliability is—together with his belief that *not-p*—not that you believe that *p*, but rather that *p* (as you believe)" (Enoch 2010: §7). What matters to demotion is not that *one believes* that *p*, but that from one's first-person perspective, *things are* such that *p*.

Enoch brings these considerations to bear on Hurdle 1 when he responds to the worry that what really underlies his view is just "the Extra Weight View, the view according to which you should, in cases of disagreement, give extra weight to your view simply because, well, it is your view." He writes:

your reason for not 'splitting the difference' in cases of peer disagreement is not that your view counts for more because it is your view. Rather, it is that the credence you end up with seems (to you) best supported by the non-chauvinistic evidence. (Enoch 2010: §8)

Enoch's response to the worry, and thus to Hurdle 1, is that his view does not assign extra weight to one's own opinion—does not privilege one's own opinion in the absence of independent explanations—but instead involves settling on a credence for that *p* that, from one's first-person perspective, is best supported by the "non-chauvinistic" evidence.

But this is a move *away from* the view in which invoking the first-person perspective in disagreement supports privilege without independent explanations and towards a more standard view according to which rational belief is belief that is supported by one's evidence. And indeed Enoch seems to confirm this in summarizing his overall view according to which there is no *general* epistemic significance of disagreement:

[T]he central point here is that there is no strategy—none, that is, that is more specific than the strategy of believing what is best supported by the evidence—that is generally justified. (Enoch 2010: §10)

In these explanations and summaries of his argument, Enoch declines opportunities to explain how the epistemology of disagreement contains within it a special epistemic relevance for the first-person perspective. Instead, Enoch explains how a role that the first-person perspective plays in epistemology in general has application in the epistemology of disagreement in particular.⁹ Much like Kelly's (2005) view (see fn. 7), Enoch's view looks like it clears Hurdle 2 only because it is not, after all, offering a view in which the epistemic

9. To put the point in a related way, one may allow that the first-person perspective plays a role in general epistemic principles yet deny that it has any role to play in any epistemic principles that arise specifically in the epistemology of disagreement, and deny even that the epistemology of disagreement offers up any special epistemic principles. See Wedgwood (2010: §6) for the distinction between special and general epistemic principles.

relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement is to explain privilege without independent explanations.

We are looking for the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement. Enoch's paper does not find it. According to Enoch's view, at best the epistemology of disagreement inherits from epistemology in general a familiar relevance for the first-person perspective, in the counsel to believe in accordance with one's evidence. Although Enoch's view describes an epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective *for* the epistemology of disagreement, it does not describe an epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective that originates in the epistemology of disagreement itself.

Finally, what this discussion of Enoch suggests about the schematic rendering of the reasoning that we began with is (1) that this reasoning goes too far by licensing demotion in too many cases, and (2) that in the cases where demotion is licensed, it is licensed not by some special epistemic relevance for the first-person perspective in disagreement but by the familiar view that one should believe in accord with one's evidence.

2.2 *Reflective Self-Trust*

Let's pick up a loose thread left behind in the discussion of Enoch. Enoch suggests that it is in reflective disagreement that one finds the relevance of the first-person perspective for the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement.¹⁰ But how does *reflective* disagreement embody within it the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective?

Perhaps the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is to be found in

The general epistemic significance of self-trust

Modeling disagreement from the third-person perspective fails to model at least some disagreements, namely those that are *reflective*. The third-person perspective on the disagreement has (by hypothesis) no reasons of its own to prefer one opinion over another. But the parties to the disagreement *do* have, from their respective perspectives, reasons of their own to prefer one opinion over another. Not only that: because the disagreement is reflective, these reasons have been secured against challenges and reflectively conceptualized as good reasons, all of course from within and to the satisfaction of the very perspectives in which they function as reasons. This is a sufficient basis for privilege without independent explanations. If one rejects the idea that this is a sufficient basis, that must be because one accepts a more general skepticism that is either independent of disagreement or into which the skeptical tendencies of the skeptical response to peer disagreement can generalize. In any event, this is familiar philosophical ground, where skepticism is properly countered by invoking the epistemic importance of

10. See also Kelly's (2005) statement of his dogmatist view: "once I have *thoroughly scrutinized the available evidence and arguments that bear on some question*, the mere fact that an epistemic peer strongly disagrees with me about how that question should be answered does not itself tend to undermine the rationality of my continuing to believe as I do" (Kelly 2005: 170; emphases added).

self-trust. The epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is that only by invoking it does the *general epistemic importance of self-trust* come into view.

In this section I want to elaborate and assess this reasoning by briefly considering, with reference to our two hurdles, Richard Foley's (2001) account of the nature, theoretical consequences, and limits of self-trust.

In Foley's view, the self-trust appropriate for a cognitive resource is determined by its invulnerability to intellectual self-criticism—a matter of one's cognitive resources "standing up to one's own, most severe scrutiny." One should not be able to "mount what on reflection is what one would regard as a convincing critique of the accuracy of the opinion" (Foley 2001: 28) or of the truth-conduciveness of the procedures and faculties that result in such opinions.¹¹ Self-trust is the relation that one bears to the cognitive resources that one can rely on, if any (I explain below), in the face of the challenges that underlie disagreement. With respect to Hurdle 1, self-trust elaborates the basis of privilege for one's own opinion. One does not privilege one's own opinion merely because it is one's own; indeed, in general, one does not privilege one's own opinion. But one can privilege one's own opinion when one has self-trust in it. These considerations about the nature of self-trust explain how Foley's view can be thought of as making an attempt to clear Hurdle 1.

Turning to theoretical consequences, Foley defends self-trust as a viable alternative to what he takes to be the failures of both classical foundationalism and naturalized epistemology to respond to the challenge of traditional skepticism and to provide a framework for epistemology as it is relevant to the inquirer from an internal, first-person perspective. Self-trust is fundamental to an epistemology in which justifications have come to an end but that aims still to explain the rationality of the internal first-person perspective of the inquirer (Foley 2001: 4–6; 12–13). However, the question most relevant here is not whether self-trust can provide the basis for a viable response to traditional skepticism. For even if self-trust could do that, it is not clear how it follows that self-trust can provide the basis for a viable response to the skeptical challenge embodied in peer disagreement. There are a number of important differences between the skeptical challenge that peer disagreement poses and traditional skepticism. But it is instructive to focus on a key difference, one that concerns the role of other minds in disagreement.¹²

11. Foley is not entirely explicit on this point, but presumably, "one's own most severe scrutiny" falls short of traditional skeptical challenge, for precisely what motivates an interest in self-trust is the inability to answer such skepticism in a non-question-begging way. Alternatively, severe scrutiny may include traditional skeptical challenge, but our cognitive resources may be able to "stand up" to such scrutiny without providing an answer to the skeptic. For related discussion see Boghossian (2000), Pryor (2004), Williamson (2004, 2007).
12. Here are two other differences that make a difference. (1) *Different Thesis*: The skeptical response to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement can, when applied across many or systematic disagreements, accumulate into a general skepticism, but it is not in the first instance a general skepticism. (2) *Actual Not Merely Possible*: Traditional skeptical arguments are based in the possibility of error. Disagreement deals with actual error, not just possible error. Parties to a disagreement are aware that someone is in error but have no independent reason to think that it is not they themselves who are in error (cf. Wedgwood 2010: §1).

The difference is this: whereas traditional skepticism is supported by reasoning about the possibility of error in the use of one's faculties, like perception, a skeptical response to the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement is supported by reasoning about the epistemic relevance of other minds for one's own mind. But if this is right, there is room to grant that self-trust can form the basis for a viable response to traditional skepticism yet not form the basis for a viable response to skepticism about peer disagreement. One can allow that invulnerability of one's cognitive resources to *self*-doubt explains why one can persist in confidence in one's opinions in the face of arguments that stem from the possibility of error, and yet still resist the idea that it explains why one can persist in confidence in one's opinions in the face of the doubting opinions of *others*. How does it follow from *the fact that I am rational when I can answer challenges that I pose for myself that I can be rational when I cannot answer challenges that others pose for me*?¹³ Answering this question would amount to explaining how self-trust constitutes a genuine symmetry-breaker that is not reinstated by a consideration of other minds. It would thus amount to a plausible clearing of Hurdle 2.

The response to this question must, it seems, run along the following lines. For one to even recognize a challenge that another poses as a challenge one must be able to appreciate that challenge from the first-person perspective. A challenge that one cannot appreciate from one's first-person perspective is indistinguishable, from one's first-person perspective, from no challenge at all. But appreciating a challenge from the first-person perspective is making the challenge a challenge that one poses for oneself. And by hypothesis one's cognitive resources are invulnerable to *self*-doubt. This means either that I cannot answer all the challenges that I pose for myself (when I cannot answer challenges posed by others but that I can appreciate) or that I can answer challenges posed by others (when I can answer challenges posed by others that I can appreciate). So disagreement does not bring with it cases in which I can answer challenges that I pose for myself but not answer challenges that others pose for me. So other minds pose no insurmountable challenge for self-trust.

The problem with this response is that the notion *appreciating a challenge that others pose for one* fails to recognize the real difference that other minds make in peer disagreement. The argument works on an interpretation of that notion in which the challenge posed by another mind is given some normative force, but not a normative force that determines judgment. But this interpretation of *appreciating a challenge that others pose for one* fails to recognize that the challenge

13. This is a question about the limits of self-trust. Foley holds that disagreement with a recognized epistemic superior, what Foley calls *specialized authority*, show that our self-trust "is only presumptive . . . not absolute" (Foley 2001: 108), and thus describes a limit to self-trust. But the crucial question is not whether the presumption of self-trust can be defeated by conflict with an epistemic *superior*, but whether the presumption of self-trust can be defeated when one's opinions conflict with an epistemic *peer*. However, on this question, Foley's view returns the skeptical answer (Foley 2001: 110–111). This dovetails with the view here. When Foley focuses on peer disagreement in particular, self-trust gives way to skepticism. Foley's comprehensive and sustained attempt to push the anti-skeptical consequences of self-trust runs into exactly the limit I am concerned to expose: of being unable to provide a basis for privilege without independent explanations.

issues from another mind, and indeed a peer; and even if it does recognize that the challenge issues from another mind, it takes the other mind to be a demoted mind, and thus becomes a form of the demotion strategy discussed in the previous section.¹⁴ The key difference between the challenge one poses for oneself and the challenge others pose for one is that, for the other mind, the challenge does determine judgment, but not in favor of one's own conclusion. But one cannot appreciate the challenge that others pose for one in this stronger sense and still be able to answer the challenge, because the challenge would determine judgment; any answer one could muster would fall short of answering the challenge given that the challenge now determines judgment.

What this discussion suggests about the schematic rendering of the reasoning that we began with is that although self-trust may entail some anti-skeptical consequences, it does not entail anti-skepticism about peer disagreement. In particular it fails to explain how invoking the first-person perspective allows one to privilege one's own opinion without independent explanations. At best, it makes use of the demotion strategy that was criticized in the previous section.

2.3 *Epistemic Immediacy in the First-Person Perspective*

I turn now to a final, interrelated, stab at trying to explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective as allowing privilege without independent explanations. Perhaps the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is to be found in

The epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective

Modeling disagreement from the third-person perspective builds in a mediating step into rational deliberation about what to believe in the face of awareness of disagreement. From the third-person perspective, there are reasons to believe p and reasons to believe not- p , but these reasons are, roughly, a combination of other people's reasons for believing p or for believing not- p together with reasons to believe these others. But no thinker capable of rational deliberation (not even the thinker envisioned as occupying the third-person perspective in peer disagreement) could have only *mediate* reasons for forming beliefs; at least *some* reasons must be *immediate*. These immediate reasons include reasons that form the rational basis of privilege without independent explanations. The epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is that only by invoking it does the *epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective* come into view.

Does this explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective?

Ralph Wedgwood (2007, 2010) pursues this kind of idea in some recent work.¹⁵ According to Wedgwood, deep, trenchant, systematic disagreement—

14. This is not surprising because, as was indicated, the strategies are interrelated.

15. Wedgwood focuses on moral disagreement, but his arguments have relevance and consequences for the general issue as well.

what I have been calling ‘reflective disagreement’—brings forth the specter of a “moral evil demon” (2007: §11.3). Moral evil demons are causes of moral error that are neither procedural irrationality nor non-moral error or ignorance, and that are undetectable upon reflection. In Wedgwood’s view, moral evil demons do their work on one’s pre-theoretic intuitions, rendering them in deep and systematic error. Under these conditions, further reflection can only serve to reinforce error, not root it out. In reflective moral disagreement someone is the unwitting victim of a moral evil demon. The problem, pressed by the skeptical response to peer disagreement, is that in such cases there are no independent grounds for thinking that either party to the disagreement is more likely to be in error. If we assume that there is no privilege without independent explanations, the result is moral skepticism.

Wedgwood rejects this skepticism in favor of a view that allows an *egocentric epistemic bias* in favor of one’s own intuitions (Wedgwood 2007: 261). To clear Hurdle 1, this egocentric epistemic bias needs an explanation. Part of the explanation is based on an entitlement or default justification for taking intuitions at face value in the absence of “any special reasons to regard these intuitions as unreliable” (Wedgwood 2007: 261). Wedgwood describes this as a kind of *primitive trust*. He goes on to argue further that there is a “general requirement of rationality” that one minimize the sources in which one has primitive trust and for this reason, primitive trust is reserved for one’s own, and not extended to others’, intuitions. This is an egocentric epistemic bias. This account of egocentric epistemic bias plausibly clears Hurdle 1.

What about Hurdle 2? To address this, we can consider Wedgwood’s recent elaboration of his position. Wedgwood writes:

It does not seem possible for me currently to form a moral belief *directly* on the basis of *your* moral intuitions. At best, I can only directly base my current formation of a moral belief on my *beliefs* about your moral intuitions . . . [T]here is no such immediate tendency for *your* moral intuitions to incline me to accept the corresponding moral beliefs; even my own *beliefs* about your moral intuitions do not seem immediately to incline me to accept the corresponding moral beliefs . . . [I]t is simply out of the question that other people’s intuitions should play the same role in rationally guiding my reasoning as my own intuitions. At most, it might be that *my beliefs* about other people’s intuitions should play the same role in guiding my reasoning as my own intuitions. But *my intuitions* seem to be such different mental states from *my beliefs about other people’s intuitions* that it is implausible to claim that they should play exactly the same role in guiding my reasoning. (Wedgwood, 2010: §7; emphasis in original)

This also helps with Hurdle 1, but does it help with Hurdle 2? I don’t think so.

To see this, consider how the skeptic can respond. The skeptic can accept that intuitions play a *direct* role in the formation of one’s own moral beliefs. The skeptic can accept that others’ intuitions do not and cannot play such a role. The skeptic can accept that at best one’s own *beliefs* about others intuitions can play a role in guiding one’s own reasoning. And the skeptic can accept that

one's own beliefs about others' intuitions do not play the same rational role as one's own intuitions, and in particular do not directly or immediately incline one to belief. But the skeptic will oppose the idea that one's beliefs about others' intuitions should not, maybe indirectly through some supplementary reasoning, incline one to lose confidence in one's beliefs. This supplementary reasoning is just that which makes use of the idea of no privilege without independent explanations. More specifically, the skeptic can note that everything that she has admitted so far about intuitions and beliefs applies to both parties to a disagreement, even when she herself is one of those parties. This reinstates the symmetry that the distinction between one's own intuitions and beliefs about others' intuitions might seem to have broken. So Hurdle 2 is not cleared. So there is no explanation for privilege without independent explanations. Since there is by hypothesis no independent basis for privileging one's own perspective, the skeptic comes to her skeptical conclusion.

What this discussion suggests about the schematic rendering of the reasoning that we began with is that even if some reasons must be immediate, these immediate reasons do not form the basis for an explanation of privilege without independent explanations. The skeptical response to peer disagreement does not require that others' intuitions be objects of primitive trust, but only that beliefs about them, in particular beliefs that one's peer's intuitions differ from one's own intuitions, be such as to be able to defeat, perhaps together with other considerations, the primitive trust that one has in one's own intuition. Wedgwood does not explain why this primitive trust is not defeated by the awareness of the disagreement (cf. Christensen 2009: §4.2 for brief but congenial discussion).¹⁶

3. Another Approach

So far I have: reconstructed the potential epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective as that of providing support for privilege without independent explanations; outlined some different ways that privilege without independent explanations might be thought to arise from the first-person perspective; and considered some views that make use of these ways. I have argued that none of these ways and none of the views that make use of them explain how the first-person perspective provides support for privilege without independent explanations, and thus do not explain (given my reconstruction) the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in the epistemology of disagreement.

But are there some more general conclusions that we can draw from this? And if extant approaches fail to explain the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective, how is the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective to be explained? In this final section, I provide a sketch of an

16. It might be argued that primitive trust is not defeated by general skeptical challenge—what is required are specific reasons for doubting that intuition is working properly. But either the appeal to general skeptical challenge is an appeal to traditional skepticism, in which case this point is irrelevant, or it is an appeal the kind of skepticism that is engendered by disagreement, in which case it begs the question. See also fn. 11.

alternative approach, one that builds on what are genuine insights in the authors that I have considered, but that organizes them into a quite different picture of not only the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective but also the epistemic significance of disagreement. In what follows, I describe the insights on which I would like to build, and then set them in a contrasting picture. I first sketch the picture and then fill out some of the details.

Here is the sketch. The authors that I have considered are, collectively, on to some important insights, especially concerning the special theoretical interest that attaches to reflective disagreement. But their failure to connect the first-person perspective to privilege without independent explanations is indicative of a basic error in their views: the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is *not* to explain privilege without independent explanations and not, further down the road, to support an anti-skeptical view of the epistemic significance of disagreement. These views bring in the first-person perspective too late, and assume that the existence of the disagreement is in an important sense *transparent* to the parties to the disagreement even in reflective disagreement. But the existence of a disagreement is not transparent to the parties in reflective disagreements. In reflective disagreement, the univocality of thoughts cannot be taken for granted and parties to a disagreement can have a *reflective suspicion of equivocation* in the disagreement (even when there is no equivocation). The reflective suspicion of equivocation is a feature of a more general normative phenomenon that is manifest in reflective disagreement, namely that of the *epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding*. These limits are in-principle, epistemic limits that spring from jointly unsatisfiable epistemic norms that require one (1) to think as clearly as one is able about the subject matter of disagreement, and (2) to understand fully the challenge that the attitudes and epistemic evaluations of the other party to the disagreement pose for one. The epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective is to explain not privilege without independent explanations but these in-principle epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding. And the epistemic significance of disagreement is not to provide new epistemological territory for skepticism or some sort of coordinate anti-skeptical view to claim, but to highlight the existence of a mental state that is distinct from the *passive* states of lowered and maintained confidence advocated by the skeptic and anti-skeptic, respectively, a mental state that *actively* switches between a *reflective suspicion of equivocation* and *irrationality*.

Here are the details.

3.1 *The Insights*

The authors that I have considered are correct in thinking that the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement is to be answered by understanding the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective. They are also right to try to locate the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective in reflective disagreement in particular, where, as Enoch puts it, the “believing self is fully engaged” (Enoch 2010: §3). There is also an important question, first broached in the discussion about self-trust, of how parties to a disagreement

conceptualize each others' minds in the course of reflectively thinking through the disagreement that exists between them. Reflective disagreements involve not only thinking about the world but also thinking about and evaluating one's own and others' attitudes, including the most basic principles, norms, and rules used in justifying belief. In this sense, reflective disagreement involves metarepresentational and evaluative cognitive resources. Finally, there is something important about the epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective but it is not the epistemic immediacy of intuition that is of most interest for the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement. We can summarize the collective insights in the following thesis: *the epistemic significance of disagreement is to be found in the epistemic immediacy in the first-person perspective as it figures in reflective disagreement*. This is an important insight.

3.2 *An Alternative Picture*

But this insight has to be set in the right picture. Behind extant thinking about the question of the epistemic significance of disagreement lies the following kind of picture. In a reflective peer disagreement, the competing evaluations of the evidence constitute reciprocal challenges for the parties to the disagreement. Mutual awareness of disagreement between peers sets up reciprocal arcs of rational tension between distinct perspectives. The skeptical view accepts this picture unmitigated and asks for lowered confidence on the part of both parties to the disagreement. But this picture poses a problem for those who wish to support the anti-skeptical view: the problem of explaining how the reciprocal challenges are overcome. The authors that I have considered try to respond to this problem by invoking the first-person perspective and arguing that its relevance is to provide, in the different ways they describe, support for privilege without independent explanations in reflective disagreements. This privilege then explains how the reciprocal challenges are to be overcome.

But this is not the right picture in which to find the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective. The first-person perspective does not do its epistemically relevant work *after* the arcs of rational tension are set up; rather, the first-person perspective poses an obstacle to setting up the arcs of rational tension properly in the first place. If that is right, then the problem is not that of explaining how to overcome the reciprocal challenges that underlie disagreement, but rather to explain why the reciprocal challenges that underlie disagreement ultimately fail to be transferred across perspectives. The epistemic significance of disagreement, in turn, should be explained in terms of the cognitive state or states that peer disagreement makes rational, parallel to the cognitive states of lowered and maintained confidence that the skeptic and anti-skeptic, respectively, claim to be made rational in peer disagreement.

3.3 *A Semantic Explanation*

But how? How does invoking the first-person perspective explain how the reciprocal challenges that underlie peer disagreement ultimately fail to be

properly transferred across perspectives? I propose a *semantic* explanation of the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective. What I mean by a ‘semantic explanation’ is an explanation in terms of the semantics of the thoughts involved in, in particular, reflective disagreement. There is a rich tradition in the philosophy of language broadly construed that presses semantic explanations into the epistemology of disagreement, construing the semantics of such disagreement in various forms of non-factualist and relativist ways.¹⁷ I agree with this tradition in treating the epistemic issues from a semantic point of view but I reject non-factualist and relativist semantic explanations because they fail to do justice to the idea that there is a genuine disagreement at issue.¹⁸ But this is not the place to elaborate a case against non-factualist and relativist semantic explanations.

My own semantic explanation focuses on the nature of the singular concepts of thoughts or propositions that figure in reflective thinking.¹⁹ Suppose that Hawk supports hawk American foreign policy and Dove supports dove policy, and their disagreement is a reflective one. Dove’s mental attribution to Hawk of the belief that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences involves thinking about Hawk, about the attitude of believing, and about (not just with) the proposition that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences. This thinking about the proposition is done with the singular concept *that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences*.²⁰ My semantic explanation explains the epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective as lying in the individuating role the first-person perspective plays in individuating the singular concepts of thoughts or propositions that figure in reflective thinking. Reflective thinking about, on the first hand, one’s own, and on the other hand, another’s attitudes, including the thoughts or propositions to which these attitudes are directed, involves a distinction in singular concepts based in the distinction between perspectives. §3.4–§3.5 explain two interrelated ways of seeing this.

3.4 *The Reflective Suspicion of Equivocation*

The first way to see this is to notice that reflective disagreement brings with it a *reflective suspicion of equivocation*, in which it becomes a serious possibility that the disagreement is in fact not genuine, but a mere thinking or talking past one

17. I would include Carnap, Kuhn, Quine, and Davidson among philosophers who have pressed semantic explanations into the epistemology of disagreement.
18. There is a recent and burgeoning literature that addresses this issue. For some of the work that spawned this literature, see Kölbel (2003) and MacFarlane (2007).
19. In other work, I focus on explaining the perspectival nature of the concepts of thoughts or propositions involved in the conceptualizations of mindedness, one’s own and others’, in reflective or *deep* disagreement.
20. Note that where ‘that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences’ refers to the thought or proposition that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences (or to *hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences*), ‘*that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences*’ refers to a that-clause concept of thoughts or propositions expressed by expressions like ‘that hawk foreign policy makes for the best economic consequences’. The unitalicized expression refers to a thought or proposition; the italicized expression refers to a singular concept of a thought or proposition.

another, even in cases where the disagreement is genuine.²¹ The reflective suspicion of equivocation is an obstacle to the disagreement being *transparent* to the parties to the disagreement. In particular, it is not transparent to the parties to the disagreement that their disagreement is genuine and involves conflicting attitudes to one and the same thought, as opposed to subtly different thoughts.

This lack of transparency is a lack of an immediate knowledge of coreference. It is not obvious to parties to the disagreement that their disagreement is genuine and does not involve equivocation. In terms of the singular concepts of thoughts involved in reflective disagreement, it amounts to a kind of Frege puzzle, at the level of singular concepts not of ordinary objects, but of thoughts or propositions. One and the same thought is given in reflective thinking in different ways depending upon whether the thought being thought about is the content of one's own or another's attitudes. The epistemic relevance of the first-person perspective lies in the fact that the first-person perspective is partially constitutive of the nature of the singular concepts of thoughts or propositions that are involved in reflective disagreement. Perspective plays an individuating role in distinguishing the concepts of thoughts or propositions with which one thinks about one's own attitudes and those with which one thinks about others' attitudes in the course of reflective thinking and disagreement. The distinction between concepts of one and the same thought is induced by the sameness or difference in perspective of the thinker thinking about thoughts and the thinker thinking the thoughts being thought about.²²

21. Of course the possibility that there is an equivocation in a putative disagreement is always there, and may be invoked by a party to the disagreement as an explanation for the existence of the disagreement. What distinguishes reflective or deep disagreement is that the univocality of thought and talk loses its default status and equivocation becomes, in some sense, a serious possibility. This is rough and needs sharpening, but the general idea that the possibility of equivocation becomes more serious as disagreements become more and more reflective is, I think, both intuitive and sound.
22. This point is, I think, more radical than the one made by Tyler Burge (1998). According to Burge, a full understanding of the concept of a reason requires grasp of the *I* concept. The *I* concept is used to mark the distinction between cases where rational evaluations of attitudes can have an immediate rational bearing from cases in which they cannot. Rational evaluations can have an immediate rational bearing when the perspective of the reflective evaluator or reviewer is identical with the perspective being evaluated or reviewed. To actually be motivated to revise one's attitudes by such reflective evaluations requires an immediate knowledge of the identity of reviewer and reviewed as *I*. Burge seems to think that rational evaluations across perspectives cannot be immediate in part because of the possibility of differences in doxastic resources across distinct perspectives. Burge writes:

Since mismatches in information on which reasons can be based are always possible, no rational evaluation that is not universally self-evident, however reasonable, has rationally immediate application, with consequences for immediate implementation, across persons or across points of view. As long as the attitude is not taken to be one's own, there is always the possibility of a gap, and filling that gap involves a rational step. (Burge 1998: 254)

But responding to peer disagreement requires a pure distinction in perspectives, one that is there even in cases where doxastic resources are common (that, at least on some construals of 'doxastic resources', is the peer case). The gap is not one of information, but purely of perspective. This may be Burge's view as well if the permanent possibility of mismatches in information is grounded in the distinction in perspectives. But if the constitutive order of explanation is the other way around, the views are distinct.

3.5 *The Epistemic Limits of Intersubjective Understanding*

The epistemic basis for the view does not consist in the existence of some epistemic norm that prescribes a certain mental state in response to peer disagreement. The epistemic basis for privilege lies in the structure of epistemic normativity itself, and in particular from a clash that is ultimately grounded in the distinction of perspectives, in the norms governing reflective disagreement.

On one side, there is an intrasubjective norm that prescribes clarity in thought in disagreement.

An intrasubjective norm of reflective disagreement

There is an epistemic norm that prescribes that thinkers think as clearly as possible about the subject matter under dispute.

Achieving clarity in thought is a metarepresentational task. Clarity is clarity over the concepts that one thinks within the course of thinking about a subject matter. For example, it will be familiar to teachers of epistemology how the concept of a priori knowledge can be clarified by considering and responding to the objection against the a priori of arithmetic that says that arithmetic cannot be a priori because one needs experience in order to understand what '2' means or to come to grasp the concept *two*. Considering the objection provides the opportunity to clarify the independence that a priori knowledge is supposed to have from experience, which is justificational and not merely causal.²³ Clarity over the concept of a priori knowledge is part of our knowledge of what a priori knowledge is and what is and what is not a priori knowable. Our knowledge of the nature of a priori knowledge involves a reflective dimension.

But what is it to have clarity over the concepts that one thinks with in thinking about a subject matter? I briefly explicate non-factive and factive versions of the idea. The non-factive notion of clarity is the notion of a reflective equilibrium between one's thinking about concepts and one's thinking with concepts, such that one's thinking about concepts serves to reflectively justify one's thinking with concepts. For example, one has greater clarity over the concept of a priori knowledge when one's belief that arithmetic is a priori knowable is justified in such a way that it contains resources to respond to the challenge that it takes experience to come to know what '2' means. Recognizing that it is part of the concept of a priori knowledge that it is justificational and not causally independent of experience helps to reflectively justify and stabilize one's belief that arithmetic is knowable a priori in the face of challenge. In general, clarity over one's concepts consists in a tight justificatory fit between one's first-order and one's reflective, metarepresentational, attitudes. In the limit, this kind of tight justificatory fit rules out alternative views as epistemically impossible. If these views remained epistemically possible, then

23. My point does not turn on accepting this clarification of the concept of a priori knowledge. It can and has been challenged (e.g., see Williamson 2013). That it has been challenged does not show that there is no such thing as levels of clarity over concepts.

reflective thinking would need to deal with the challenge of explaining why these alternative views are not correct. If such an explanation were forthcoming, then the alternative view would be ruled out as epistemically impossible. If such an explanation were not forthcoming, then one's attitudes would not be reflectively justified to the point that a reflective equilibrium has been established. The factive version of the idea of clarity requires not only the reflective equilibrium, but also that the first-order and metarepresentational attitudes be correct and such as to describe real relations of epistemic support.²⁴

The intrasubjective norm to think as clearly as one is able about a subject matter comes into conflict with another norm of reflective disagreement. This is the intersubjective norm that prescribes that thinkers fully understand the challenges that peers pose.

An intersubjective norm of reflective disagreement

There is an epistemic norm that prescribes that thinkers fully understand the challenges that peers pose for their own attitudes.

Reflective justification partly consists in being able to respond to challenges, and being able to respond to challenges requires being able to understand fully the challenges that other thinkers and their epistemic evaluations pose for one's attitudes. In effect the norm prescribes that one respond rationally to the information that others, including peers, disagree with one, including to their reasons for holding conflicting attitudes.

Suppose now two peers are in reflective disagreement. This means that each party to the disagreement has achieved at least the non-factive kind of clarity that I described, in which, for each side, there is a tight justificatory fit between the first-order and reflective, metarepresentational attitudes. But since thinkers are in reflective disagreement, the thinkers' reflective (first-order) attitudes cannot be in a tight justificatory fit with the first-order (reflective) attitudes of their reflectively disagreeing peer. But given the non-factive interpretation of clarity, this amounts to an inability to understand the thoughts of a disagreeing reflective peer with the same clarity with which one can understand one's own thoughts. It amounts to an inability to fully understand the thoughts of one's reflectively disagreeing peer.

The tension between the two norms is manifest in a dilemma a thinker faces in trying to understand the attitudes and epistemic evaluations of a reflectively disagreeing peer for the purposes of gaining or improving knowledge. The dilemma is that one cannot simultaneously think with one's clearest understanding of one's concepts *and* reconstruct fully the thinking of a peer in reflective disagreement, even though both clarity in thought and full understanding of another's perspective (and the challenges it poses) are norms of reflective disagreement.

24. These non-factive and factive notions of clarity express epistemically internalist and externalist variants of a general idea. Non-factive clarity requires a tight *internalist* justificatory fit. Factive clarity requires, in addition, a tight *externalist* justificatory fit.

Suppose that one thinks with one's clearest understanding. Then there is a tight justificatory fit between one's reflective attitudes and first-order attitudes. This fit makes conflicting attitudes, in the limit of perfectly tight fit, epistemically impossible. So bringing one's clearest understanding to understanding the attitudes and epistemic evaluations of a reflectively disagreeing peer reveals one's peer to be holding views that upon the clearest reflection one can manage are epistemically impossible. But this is disagreement with an epistemic peer, and one's epistemic peer is not plausibly understood to have come to believe something that is epistemically impossible. So perhaps what one's peer believes is not what one thought one's peer believed. This is the reflective suspicion of equivocation. This is an epistemic *limit of intersubjective understanding*.

Suppose instead that one reconstructs the attitudes and epistemic evaluations of one's peer fully, but not with one's clearest understanding brought to bear. But if the point of reconstructing one's peers attitudes and epistemic evaluations is to gain or improve knowledge, one cannot make use of one's understanding of another's attitudes and epistemic evaluations to inform one's own because their bearing will be unclear, from one's own perspective, on reflective matters on which clarity is required. The extent of the inability to understand another's attitudes overlaps exactly the kind of understanding that is required to make epistemic gain. This is an *epistemic limit* of intersubjective understanding.

So this dilemma, and the tension between the norms of reflective thinking it manifests, reveals the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding.

3.6 *Actively between the Reflective Suspicion of Equivocation and Irrationality*

This distinction between concepts of thoughts or propositions constitutes a distinct basis (distinct from a basis in privilege without independent explanations) for a permission to persist in confidence in the face of peer disagreement, the existence of which is characteristic of anti-skeptical views. The distinction in concepts of thoughts or propositions sets an obstacle to setting up the arcs of rational tension between perspectives and provides the basis for a limited permission to persist in confidence in reflective disagreement. The distinction in concepts of thoughts or propositions makes a reflective suspicion of equivocation rational even when there is a genuine disagreement and the suspicion is ultimately mistaken.

The kind of permission described here is not best understood as that of some anti-skeptical view that is opposite to but nevertheless coordinate with the skeptical view. There are two chief differences. The first we have seen, namely, that the permission is not based in the norms of disagreement pointing in an anti-skeptical direction in peer disagreement, but in a structural tension in the norms of disagreement that is ultimately manifest in the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding. The second difference, to be explained now, lies in the mental state that is ultimately made rational in disagreement. On the view being defended here, the kind of mental state that is called for by reflective

disagreement is in an important sense *active* and intersubjective in contrast to what are the *static* and intrasubjective recommendations of the skeptical and anti-skeptical views as we have so far encountered them.²⁵

To see this, it is first of utmost importance to emphasize the reflective and in particular metarepresentational nature of the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding. The thesis is not that thinkers in a reflective disagreement are thinking or talking past each other. Thinkers in reflective disagreement take conflicting attitudes to the same thought or proposition. What is different, what is individuated partly on the basis of perspective, are the concepts of thoughts or propositions that figure in the reflective thinking about one's own and others' minds.

This distinction in concepts of thoughts or propositions entails a lack of immediate knowledge of the coreference of the thoughts or propositions, one's own and one's peer's, at issue in the disagreement.²⁶ But this lack of *immediate* knowledge is consistent with a kind of *eventual* knowledge. Just as one can come to know that Hesperus is Phosphorus, one can come to know that the thought that another believes is the same as the thought that one oneself disbelieves. In that case, the arcs of rational tension become properly set up, and one is under pressure to lower confidence.²⁷ But this state—of being in a reflective disagreement where it is known that one is in fact disagreeing—is from a rational point of view, unstable and should give way either to lowering one's confidence in one's opinions, or more likely, to pushing the bump of equivocation around to other parts of another's perspective, and to suspect equivocation *there*. Reflective disagreement is a medium of less than perfect conductance of the challenges posed by others, but it does not render thinkers perfectly insulated either.

And this process iterates. It is what thinking through a reflective disagreement consists in. It constitutes thinkers' deepest engagement with themselves and others in the project of acquiring knowledge. In thinking through a reflective peer disagreement, thinkers try both to think as clearly as they can about the subject matter and to understand fully the challenges that the conflicting perspective of their peers present for them. But the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding make this impossible. In response, thinkers enter a mental state that is essentially active and that consists in switching back and forth between a reflective suspicion of equivocation and an irrational persistence in confidence in one's own opinion in the face of known (although not immediately known) disagreement. Entering into this active mental state is

25. Skeptical and anti-skeptical views either require lowering confidence or permit persisting in belief. Although they may (no doubt) advocate further epistemically fruitful activities, disagreement itself directs a thinker to a particular kind of relatively static mental state.
26. For discussion of the role of immediate knowledge of coreference in the individuation of concepts, see Dickie and Rattan (2010) and Rattan (2013).
27. Here, aspects of the skeptical view are at work in the view being defended here, and give further reason not to think of the view being defended here as a kind of anti-skeptical view in any standard sense.

the rational response to reflective peer disagreement.²⁸ The epistemic significance of disagreement is neither skeptical nor dogmatic, but *dialectical*, involving an active mental state that conceptualizes not only the subject matter but also one's own and others' minds in thinking and rational interaction at the epistemic limits of intersubjective understanding.

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28. The general view here, though not its details, bears some resemblance to the view that Crispin Wright (2001) defends according to which certain puzzles about relativism, vagueness, and logical revisionism require us to recognize the existence of a distinctive form of attitudinal relation of "intellectual bafflement" (Wright 2001: 45) to a proposition—what Wright calls a *quandary*. A major difference between the views is that my view is set in a realist setting, while Wright's view is explicitly constructed so as to avoid commitment to realism. For another related idea, see Michael Caie (2012), who invokes indeterminate doxastic states to answer the normative question of what attitude one who advocates a paracomplete solution to the liar paradox should take to the proposition expressed by a liar paradoxical sentence.

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